

ALBATROSS



#15

“God save thee, ancient Mariner!
From the fiends that plague thee thus!—
Why lookst thou so?”—With my crossbow
I shot the ALBATROSS.

ALBATROSS

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15

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Late Winter Kabbalah

Beartooth Highway
with sunlight hung
before the black rule
of new storm clouds.

Air cut my throat like a bone,
ice-notched.
My breath stood—
a cloud, smoke, or fog.

And so I imagine
prophets
and miracle makers
knew the word of God—

first a barbed inhalation,
a brutal verb,
then warmed breath twining
before their eyes.

A Slice of Papaya

Breezes brisk as the spray of whales as flippers, tails beneath
the surface of the Kohala Coast, we
sense vastness in the way our legs cross, clouds whose roots
descend to continents of coral. We remember

Between lip and lips, this portion
births in small churches, the backyard under
flood waters,
a drought worthy of rain dances
bridges washed away between shipwrecks
and the scraping of forks
among the plantations, the stumps
where divorces graze, jazz resolutions
as violins play on tortoise shells,
golden tongues now silent
from this cold sun, these.

Most of all, this wedding, flames of our eyes,
dream horses
mutual respect, biographies
that stem from the captain
of our hearts.
Already leeward breezes, coastal sands,
hot to live in the spout spray of humpbacks,
dorsals of dolphins,
making memories out of more than sand.

Seahenge

from Osip Mandelstom

We do not need the island's gifts,
A forest of uninvited ships.

Nature's the same as Rome, was reflected in it.
We see images of its civic might
In the clear air and sky-blue circus,
In the forum of fields, the colonnades of groves.

I swung in a distant garden
On a tall plain wooden swing,
Tall dark trees
In a feverish haze.

The flame annihilates
My withered life,
Now it isn't stone
I sing, but wood.

Light and rough;
A single slab
From the heart of the oak:
Oars of the fisherman.

Drive the pilings tighter.
Pound, you hammers,
Around the wooden paradise
Where things are so much easier.

Back in the Holding Tank

In college, in animal behavior,
the mice were pink, hairless,
and blind. We'd drop them—
not far, a foot at most—
and record their responses.

Back in the holding tank
they'd screw—brother and sister—
if not separated at birth.
In the lab it did not smell
of spring, thought that's what

is often associated with such
fertility. The earth quitting
its futzing, unpacking peonies,
shaking new chipmunks
onto the ground. The moon

driving everyone nuts.
How easily we are bruised.
At the coast we listen
to the ocean race, threading
itself through rock to make

more rock as it has
since all mammals were the size
of mice, since the earth
first joined plus and minus,
that is, exclaimed life.

when i lie completely still

i feel it crisp
as lettuce

like a bud
under
the rainforest

below
my belly button

it is only hard earth, i beckon
push
through the dark

it beats behind
a thin wall of skin
a shoot that is shoving
through
tough soil and rock muscle
pushing against gravity

they call it
a main artery taking blood
away

but i call it life
searching to find its way through
the dark

While We Were Gone

the grass kept growing
Its agenda
was larger than
ours There
was no way
to stop it As we

sat in restaurants
or swam among
small colored fishes
it was
pushing up

without
encouragement
of any sort
from roots accustomed
to waiting

without
water
or heat

or permission
from the likes
of us—who would
tell it: Only
this far—

It was following
orders that
said: Continue
beyond the
understanding
of anyone

despite resistance
and mutilation

*

because
they count
on you, on
the pulse
of your cells

to align their
finite terror
with the movement
of stars

Row of Poplars

Wiry brown fingers beckon
my eyes into a blueness
that darkens far up into space.

A pack of beavers chew off
all the lowest branches
and drag them to the stream.

Woodpeckers hollow a few,
and burnt resin from distant stumps
bitters the air around me.

It's late and the horizon
purples into night—
it's a long walk back.

Bullfrogs and cicadas voice accompaniment
to the pepper-gold of lightning bugs;
around my head, they spark like stars.

The pressure of wind ignored
as easily as my presence,
they sway only slightly.

Were they children lined up
outside a sandstone school,
I'd swear they were laughing.

The Toppled Fig Tree

You hauled the tree up
from its fallen position by the skill
of leverage and stubbornness,

laid boards against its trunk,
tied ropes around, positioned jacks,
tied it off in stakes

and, inch by inch, you raised it
off the ground. It held.
You left it that way for a year.

We stepped around the ropes and stakes
until we were certain the roots
had grabbed again.

No wind has felled it since
though hard winds came. And rains.
It held. Its yield

was just as fine—and we think
even better—crop enough
for early jam and wine, we said.

Figs dropped, there are so many now,
and birds destroy the largest and the
sweetest ones. You curse those birds.

Frogs

We hear of frogs that are missing, that are
deformed, that are thinking new thoughts,
there in their bog of language and evolution,
strange to themselves—or not even strange,
but different—green—smelling and iridescent,
like spells cast by witches in fairy tales.
But, here, they are real—enormous—throated
with warning, with trepidation,
the world around them bristling with doom.
They freeze, then leap
into known environments—the shallow green
of murk, the thickening shadow of extinction.

Just Pretend

Pretend that oil spills
Are part of the price
For our way of living.

Daring to pretend is easy,
Shoulder shrugging,
The ruin of Africa.

We pretend it is fair
And time will tell.
Doesn't this car run like a charm?

Pretend you can swallow,
Breathe, and ingest
The contents of the spill.

Pretend it is an
Experiment that
Must be carried out.

And just pretend all the profit
From this business
Was for you alone.

The Gardens She Loved

Horsing around:
The zinnias, potted
In coffee cans,
Barely surviving
The stray fastball.

Not much has lived
In the backyard
Without a small,
Fatal accident
Happening to it.

A mother's work
Destroyed by men,
Young and old. It is
Only years later
We realize this.

Horsing around:
She never said
A thing. She merely
Gave up on it:
The garden she loved.

Human Occupation of These Islands

We're hearing extinct birds
singing in the tree-tops,
long vanished animals
scrambling through the scrub.

The day has white double stripes
down its back, fluttering from
its wing bands. It is giant and
free and stealing the hen's eggs.

All that scientific tracking men do,
all those pokes in the mud,
scrapes from the tree, all those
fine articles in journals about

how the world is hemorrhaging,
how we know so little of
what there is now nothing to know
and we have it all here,

cut-off and rare but warbling
in our branches, slicing through
our streams, rambling over our
fields, our hill-sides,

living for a million years
or for as long as whatever
passes between us refuses to
pass from this world.

Dairy Farmer

The silo is almost new,
showing he didn't know how

to read the times, even after
a life of calling the weather right.

Looks like all he did when the Grand Union
spread itself across his road was plant

a willow to block the view, willing
to take a chance with its roots in his well.

His attic window is smashed by bats,
his roof caved in over the front door.

Imagine him now in the Veteran's Home,
still out of bed by milking time, looking for his teeth.

For no reason, someone will buy
that rusted plow his father's horses pulled.

Coastal Flood Warnings

June was best for oysters,
Grandpa hip-deep in high boots,
gazing nowhere while his rake did the work.

Putt of Evinrude, me littlest at the bow,
tied up in a leaden life preserver,
salt savor, coming around from the harbor.

Easter Sundays, he opened the place.
After he shoveled sand from cement sidewalks
he'd laid to the high tide line,

he'd hang ironed curtains from a flat box,
scrape salt from the windows,
and fire the generator to feed the radio.

Now his neat shed is a tangle of rakes,
the filleting knife is rusted.
Nobody eats the fish.

Mother was the last
to spend a day on the porch
just watching the weather,

and another November threatens
the house on sand, no matter who
has left the world dreaming of it.

My Father Flies

No place stranger to imagine this man
I only know as tree, rock, root.
All these I thought fixed must not be;
they rise, fly into light.
I watch, disbelieving, as the plane passes over,
dips its wings. Its small body turns slightly,
rights itself, as a barn swallow might,
coming close to ground. Barn bound and rising,
these small ones are my father's birds:
forty years he has kept cats from nests,
waited each summer to see the young hatch,
learn to fly. They must fly,
as he must come to ground again,
sixty-nine years old, his first flight
a flight over dark fields he has walked and worked
longer than I have known him, than I have lived.
He comes now across these same fields,
glances up at swallows, swooping, sunlit.
How my father must know them newly,
and know now what they know:
how trees rise, rocks shine,
roots fly, into earth,
into sky.

To the Girl Who Loves Triangles

Triangulation: Technique for establishing the distance between two points using a triangle with at least one side of known length.

One girl in a friend's preschool class
loves the triangle. Tanya's favorite shape,
the children call it. Simple, three sided, at least

one slope inherent, slip-slide down
in the playground of mind. Tension and its
release. Sure balance, solid as the pyramids. The

heart's own primer. Not boring like the
round world, the monotonous square. Oh, Tanya,
do not lose your gladness. Hold firm wherever you

come down. Know one side of the shape
you love well enough, and you'll find
a way to measure the world.

As Kids, We Watched the Butterflies Dip

As kids, we watched the butterflies dip
and shimmer, faster than you'd think,
through playgrounds
then be gone.

Marigold-blossoms, blue dappled
tricksters lifted against breaths,
the pull of this world. (Some of us
imagined they painted themselves
in the morning, maybe fell
through rainbows, wet air making it
stick.)

Crazy land-mammals with fat fingers,
ridiculous clothes, we chased them, naturally,
through schoolyards and fields. Our hearts open
wide like aviaries, we tried calling them
down, tried catching them, but paper dodges
as it falls.

Besides, the sky was too blue, its brightness
too vast. We lived in dirt,
gray dust, cities cramped and almost touching.
Who could blame them?
Our wings
were just stubs
in our backs.

Among the White Crown Sparrows' Calls

They fall, these callings,
into the blue silence
like white stones
dropped one by one,

or like the red flowers
of currant bushes
shouting into the brilliant
sunlight. Sometimes

I close my eyes
and they rise around me
like thick tree trunks
which hold within
themselves

whole worlds, ripe
and green
with sap, with the dance
that surges

toward stars
glittering
on crystalline nights,
or like small, brown
birds
waiting to be reborn

with voices, waiting
to say, This is the way
to make a world,
this is the way
to greet
our new lives,

this is the way
to pull the earth
up through its own roots
singing
and singing.

Up and At 'Em

Woke to the racket
of crows
scolding a red-tail
perched atop
a four hundred foot pine.
No amount of fussing
jostled him
from his clear shot
at the nest.

He turned the kind of shoulder
I'd like to turn on the world:
this is what I'm having
for breakfast.

The crows,
and rightly so,
had no intention
of allowing anyone
to sleep through this.

So the hawk, despite the air
from black wings buffeting
his brown,
feasted on baby crow,
and, later, the surviving baby crows
swallowed baby starlings

and all through the trees,
fledglings, full and sleepy,
resettled themselves
in the dry bowls of their nests
and the berry bushes
unmolested
grew more berries.

The world went off
to work,
after breakfasts of bacon
and eggs
and the skies, the skies
were quiet.

Thinning Plums

Today, I thinned plums
hard as nuts, some
with brown lace caps
of old blossoms clinging.

In the woods,
I emptied the bucket
of green beads.
There

the fruit will soften—
not to the amber ripeness
of summer plums—
but as flesh does

and like flesh, fold itself
into moss, into
the leafy remains
of past seasons' bloom.

The Great Mirror

When it has had enough
of our thoughts,
the earth's silence ends

and slowly
or suddenly

it forms
what we have been thinking.

This is how we learn of ourselves—

what emotions
we are made of

what has been stored
within us, all that

cold silence,
fiery anger,
flooding sorrow.

That pain.

The pain which comes
fastening itself to the world
that is too much sometimes.

Like what the dry heart does—

how rage becomes
the ground's sudden quaking
and all those places of trembling dirt,
the landslides.

And of quiet spots,
our feelings are
that vast hush
with glistening meadows

the flowers there.

For Growing

As the new green springs up
to break through the hard
ground, resistant as ever

to seasonal birthings,
I sympathize today
with this small sister and

that one, tossing herself
proudly in the lovely wind,
and sending the message of

freedom to all who would die
in the cold. And so it is
with everything beautiful,

this time spent buried under
the weight of muddy formulas
for growing, trying one way

and then another out of
the darkness. And what to
say of progress, after all

these years at the desk,
gleaning my own small slant
on the subject? What to

make, with my new collection
of sounds and syllables, but
a stronger case for this:

for stepping out of yesterday's
compost, richer for the fall
and frosty solutions, into

a stronger model of who I am—
consumed, for all that,
with color and light.

Nor'Easter

The season makes the case
again about sludge always left
at the bottom of cold winter.

And I understand about
staying put on
the back porch, rocking

out your days. But what
about elevation: about
what time can do with

a predilection to circle
the pretty globe,
maybe once more.

So there she blows! my
snowy white sister, knocking
young March right off

his socks and onto the front
pages, taking precedence,
as usual, over politics. . . .

And I ready myself for the wind
coming fresh from the waters
that stir me up and out of

what land tells me
will satisfy. So what if
the lights go! And what,

even more, if she takes me
far out with her, for
a look at her fine lair,

blustery with welcome. . .
for how I have been dreaming
of this kind of homecoming,

for so long.

Spring

How is it that she can still
reach me, hiding out
under cover of my duties,

indoors? How is it that
she still slides across
the edges of my dark room

with suggestions of light,
promises of pleasure due me,
in fuller measure than I

can imagine here, cleaning
myself out of all but necessary
supplies —with her lush!

that saunters in, riotous
with color. And there you
have it! —your timely

twist of fate that makes
the difference in a life
otherwise tried by colder

varieties of nature's sport,
hunkering you down
and out of danger. There you

have it! —this seasonal
apparition I cannot dismiss
from my solitary cell, impudent

sprite, come calling me for
running and playing as children
do, in the sun— and for

making them stronger than
they ever dream— indoors.

Balance

It is a fact worth repeating
about good caution, the slow and
steady guard I must take

against going down deep to
where no strong one among us
can learn to breathe, where

damage is inevitable. But I
am no fool about my standing
here. Nor about the small

hold I have on safety. And
the ocean calls me soundly
on this as well: to pitch my

sails to a finer vessel than
that which carries me here,
insisting! on my involvement

with waves: flinging to the wind
all that I have gathered, and
diving, at these high costs,

for my freedom —for my dear
and lovely solution.

Big Bang

The evolution of the cosmos as it is today “can be compared to a display of fireworks that has just ended.” —George Lemaitre

“Eyesight should learn from reason.” —Kepler

A display of fireworks
that has just ended
inspires us
to perfect
whatever paler pyrotechnics
our best efforts can.

Race of tyros that we are,
we tackle our task
with energy
though it's clear
from the beginning
our project is doomed.

Nothing human can hope to hold
a candle to the sun.
Yet why withhold
the admiration
such mimicry
deserves.

What other species
attempts to teach
eyesight to learn
from reason;
then, looking all around itself,
allows the wonder in.

What other creature
thinks to look,
and, thinking, looks again
at all the work
before itself
the universe has just done.

No News Is Old News

A dull echo remains.
The radio astronomers are
All ears—
Big as satellite dishes.

They are listening for news that was
Out of date
Light-years ago
Yesterday

As if it will set the world on fire.
As if hearing a peep from the Big Bang
Will make them all
Young again.

Contributor's Notes

Jackie Bartley lives in Michigan and has had poems appear in CRAB ORCHARD REVIEW, PHOEBE, and THE SPOON RIVER POETRY REVIEW. Her first full length collection, BLOODROOT, was recently published by Mellen Poetry Press.

Luis Cuauhtemoc Berriozabal lives in West Covina, CA. His first book of poems, RAW MATERIALS, was published by Pygmy Forest Press in 2003.

Richard Alan Bunch's publications include SUMMER HAWK and A FOGGY MORNING. His poetry has appeared in WINDSOR REVIEW, BLACK MOON, OREGON REVIEW, HAWAII REVIEW, POETRY NOTTINGHAM, and has previously appeared in ALBATROSS.

Cara Chamberlain lives in Lakeland, FL. Her work has been published most recently in THE SPOON RIVER POETRY REVIEW, ROSEBUD, and the online journal ARCHIPELAGO. She has been nominated three times for the Pushcart Prize and has previously appeared in ALBATROSS.

Tony D'Arpino has recently appeared in BRANCHES, WILD VIOLET, RINES, and others, and he has work forthcoming in CARRIAGE HOUSE REVIEW and THE BLUE BOTTLE PROJECT, in which the poems are published in sealed bottles and set afloat. He has previously published in ALBATROSS.

John Grey has had work appear recently in SOUTH CAROLINA REVIEW, BELLEVUE LITERARY REVIEW, and PEREGRINE and forthcoming work in NEW LAUREL REVIEW. His work has previously appeared in ALBATROSS.

Therese Halscheid teaches creative writing at Atlantic Cape Community College and is a visiting writer in the schools for the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals including THE MIDWEST QUARTERLY, ELLIPSIS, SOW'S EAR POETRY JOURNAL, and BLUELINE. Her new book of poems, WITHOUT HOME, is available through Amazon.com.

Susan Johnson lives in New Salem, MA. She has an MFA from the Univ. of Massachusetts at Amherst and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in English there as well. Her poems have appeared in QUARTERLY WEST, GREENSBORO REVIEW, MASSACHUSETTS REVIEW, and others. She has previously published in ALBATROSS.

Peggy Landsman has had poetry and prose published in anthologies and literary journals, including THE MUSE STRIKES BACK (Story Line Press), TO HONOR A TEACHER (Andrews McMeel), CALYX, POETRY AT THE 33 REVIEW, and THE KERF. She is currently living in Pompano Beach, Florida.

Carol Wade Lundberg teaches creative writing at Santa Rosa Junior College in California. Her poetry has appeared in POETRY NEW YORK, GREEN MOUNTAINS REVIEW, OLD CROW, and numerous other journals. Her first book of poetry, THE SECRET LIFE, was published by Mellen Poetry Press.

John Noland lives and writes near the ocean in Coos Bay, OR. He has published in CHICAGO REVIEW, ORION, PETROGLYPH, COYOTE JOURNAL, and others.

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Carla Panciera taught high school English for ten years before taking time off to raise three daughters. Her work has appeared in several journals including NIMROD, THE OYEZ REVIEW, and YANKEE MAGAZINE.

Kim Peavey lives in southwestern NH, where she raises organic/biodynamic vegetables and sells them through a Community Supported Agriculture program. She has had two poems published in a literary edition of a Catskill Mountains paper.

Elizabeth Poreba is a NYC public high school teacher. This is her first publication.

Ryan G. Van Cleave has work forthcoming in THE HARVARD REVIEW, THE IOWA REVIEW, and ONTARIO REVIEW. His most recent books include SAY HELLO (Pecan Grove Press, 2001), an anthology LIKE THUNDER: POETS RESPOND TO VIOLENCE IN AMERICA (U of Iowa Press, 2002), and a creative writing text CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY: BEHIND THE SCENES (Longman, 2003).

Sharla Yates is a senior English major at George Fox Univ. and has had poetry appear in THE SYNERGYST.

Gail Zwirn has more than 100 poems published in journals such as PEGASUS, KIMERA, AUROREAN, PENWOOD REVIEW and others. Her first book, SEASONING, was published by The Anabiosis Press in 2003.

And I had done a hellish thing
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow.
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
That made the breeze to blow!

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

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